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Geese In Flight marks the beginning of the Enchanted Highway at exit 72 on Interstate 94. Gary Greff photo

REGENT ARTS ACTIVITIES ENJOY “Enchanted” INSPIRATION

If everything good has been inspired by something else, then the Regent area arts successes have truly been “enchanted.” The “Enchanted Highway” is a 30-mile stretch that runs from Exit 72 on I-94 down to Regent. Its success has spurred other arts programs and opportunities in the area, including a new gift shop called Prairie Works that is due to open in Regent this spring.

“I get everybody involved,” says Gary Greff, designer and founder of the Enchanted Highway, “When they are, it’s their project. The Enchanted Highway is North Dakota’s project, not just the Gary Greff project.”

Greff started the Enchanted Highway project after working 15 years in education. He returned to Regent in 1989 and questioned, “What can we do to help this town? We have a road to the interstate, but how can we get people down that road?” Greff heard about a local farmer who built a small man holding up a bale who got some publicity. From that idea, Greff began to dream bigger plans and share them with others.

“Farmers and people all over the state weld; it’s something we’re good at and the idea we have with the sculptures is unique enough to get others to come and see for themselves,” says Greff. Eagle Scouts, local farmers, and residents from the correctional facility in Dickinson have served as welders on the Enchanted Highway sculptures. Kids in grade school have also raised money by saving soup can labels, and high school shop classes have welded metal ornaments. Greff’s brother and his family run a gift shop in Regent called Metal Magic, which sells metal decorations for homes and yards. And artists from across the state will sell their individual work through the new Prairie Works store.

Many would never have believed Greff would be successful with this dream, but in reality, North Dakota Tourism estimates that between 20,000 and 25,000 people have traveled down the highway to Regent over the last three years. ‘Geese in Flight,’ which stands at the beginning of the Enchanted Highway along I-94, is in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world’s largest metal sculpture. The North Dakota National Guard aided in assembling that sculpture, and Greff hopes to have Guard soldiers involved again in future projects.

Recognition of the Enchanted Highway has brought national and international news coverage. Articles about the highway have appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, *People* magazine, and the *Los Angeles Times*, and international recognition has come from places like Germany and Japan.

Gary Greff photo



The Tin Family's farmer.

A radio documentary out of Chicago has been put together by a company called Longhaul Productions, and was broadcast on Chicago Public Radio on March 6, with additional national public radio broadcasts yet to be announced. Elizabeth Meister of Longhaul is known for taking long road trips, and took the time to drive through the western part of North Dakota after doing an assignment in Devils Lake. "The Enchanted Highway is rather well known among the culture of road-trip travel-



Gary Greff photo

ers," she explains. An Internet search will prove her point. The Enchanted Highway is listed on many road-trip traveler web sites, including roadsideamerica.com and worldisround.com.

Greff plans to have 11 sculptures when the Enchanted Highway is finished, with one sculpture every three miles. "The Tin Family," "Deer Crossing," "Theodore Roosevelt Rides Again," "Grasshoppers Delight," and "Pheasants on the Prairie" are titles of the other current sculptures. Further ideas for developments in Regent include a theatre, RV park, metal-sculpture golf course, buffalo enchantment tours, and a North Dakota-themed motel. An annual summer arts festival was started last summer, in which regional artists displayed their products, and a car show and Lewis and Clark school play were also held.

Prairie Works

Greff is the president of Prairie Works, which was formed as a non-profit organization to provide entrepreneurial training, tech support, marketing and business services to artisans in rural areas. Maggie Piatz, the director, and met Greff through the West River Regional Tourism Council.

"Our mission is to work with rural artists to help them market themselves. We gather artists and their merchandise together and help them do pricing and bookkeeping. For many, it's a stepping stone into their own business. Many artists are so busy with their work, they don't have time to reach the customer – that's where I come in," says Piatz. "I travel, teach workshops, pick up merchandise and do the marketing through storefronts, the web and promotional materials."

There is already one Prairie Works store, full of North Dakota-made art products, in Dunn Center. A second store is opening in Regent this spring out of an old implement shop

that Greff owns. There will be an open house on April 9, and the store will stay open full-time through the summer.

Nearly 100 artists are members of Prairie Works, each with their own style of extra-special fine art, from simple photography cards to quilts that retail up to \$2,000. In Mott, Carla Zich works with wheat and feathers to make wall-hangings and table pieces for homes. Roy Rhie of Raleigh twists and shapes farm and ranch ropes into decorative pieces. Roxanne Johnson of Hettinger creates original stained glass.

Another artist involved in Prairie Works is Lunette Dobitz, who lives right along the Enchanted Highway and can boast that the "Fisherman's Dream" sculpture resides on her and her husband's land. Dobitz has two passions, photography and encouraging people. She says she has often found herself in the greeting card sections of stores, trying to find just the right card for the right person. Now, in combining her two passions, she creates those perfect greeting cards by including her own North Dakota photography.

Dobitz sells her cards through area stores, and also takes custom orders. "There was one lady locally who asked me to take pictures of sunflowers beside her garage. The sunflowers were taller than the garage, and she wanted to send photo-cards of them to her family in different parts of the country, to show them that giant sunflowers really could grow that tall.

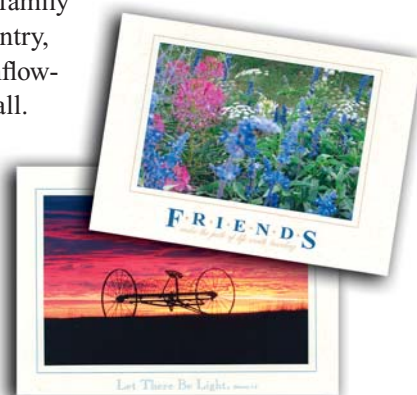
Those flowers must have been at least 10 feet tall, and in the photos, they had a beautiful blue sky behind them."

The year ahead looks to be a busy one for the artists in the Regent area.

This includes Dobitz, who will be expanding into Christmas card stock later this year. Piatz looks forward to seeing Prairie Works continue to expand, and Greff will be renting a crane this summer to weld on the top half of the 70-foot bass in "Fisherman's Dream."

Many groups and individuals have been involved in the Enchanted Highway project by donating time, materials and dollars. Anyone interested in more information can contact Greff at: 701-563-6400 or The Enchanted Highway, P.O. Box 184, Regent, ND 58650. For more information on Prairie Works, Maggie Piatz can be reached at 701-548-4579, and Prairie Works, P.O. Box 5, Dunn Center ND 58626.

The City of Regent and the Enchanted Highway have received funding through the North Dakota Council on the Arts Community Arts Access program. For more information about the North Dakota Council on the Arts and its programs that support communities across the state, call 701-328-7590, or visit its website at www.discovernd.com/arts.



Lunette Dobitz's cards are available in area stores.